

Environmental Change and Security Program



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It was only in the last quarter century that people working from within and without managed to reform organizations like Planned Parenthood and the UNFPA and redeem the cause of reproductive freedom.

Now I used to be one of those who assume

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is the numbers of homes in which people live, is now increasing at twice the rate of world population.

This is a study that was published in *Science* a couple of years ago about increase in household, numbers of households worldwide. They tried to show how even in the case of New Zealand, even in the nine districts where population was actually declining, the numbers of households was increasing. And in fact, and this is what you can see spread across the top part of this chart; the declines in population size actually coincided with increases in the numbers of households. And when you increase the numbers of households, if people live by ones, and twos, and threes, instead of multi-generational larger households, people consume more of everything per capita -- whether it's fuel, or water, or wide open spaces. So reducing the rate of population growth is not going to solve all of our environmental problems.

What about the notion that population growth fuels violence? Jared Diamond blames the Rwanda genocide on Rwanda's high population density, so too does Jeffrey Sachs in his new book *Commonwealth*, a book by the way in which Jeffrey Sachs explicitly backs population control and uses the term population control. It's true Rwanda has had a high population density, but I want you to compare Rwanda with this other country. This is another country that also has relatively high population density. Now, if you look at Rwanda on the left, you can see how it is that in those red parts of the country, you have from 500 to 1,000 or even more people living per kilometer. But if you look at the country on the right, you also see that there are many parts of the country where you have 500 to 1,000 or more people living per kilometer. So this is also one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

There are other ways in which these two countries are comparable. Like Rwanda, this country is ethnically divided. And this is a part of the world that has had many wars over religion and what many people that think of as religious fanaticism. And this included horrendous massacres and persecution, and it eventually required the partition of this country from the territory to the north in a long war, a war that lasted some nine years and drew in other neighboring states in the region.

The country to the north is a country that we now call the Netherlands. And the country I'm talking about is Belgium. It's true the worst violence occurred in earlier centuries, in the 16th Century and especially in the 19th Century, but Belgium's population was much smaller then. Now is Belgium overpopulated? If someone suggested to you that Flemings and Walloons were going to start cutting each other's throats because they couldn't possibly

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inhabit such a tiny territory together, you would think they were crazy and you would be right because political violence has complex causes, and it is not driven by demography.

If some countries are rich and others are poor, it usually has something to do with relations of power. If Belgium had been a colony of Rwanda, for instance, rather than the other way around, then I would suggest that things might have been rather different even if the population density wasn't very different. What I'm trying to suggest is that even sophisticated quantitative research – and there's a lot of very unsophisticated quantitative research in this field – even the most sophisticated quantitative research can't answer the questions that really come down to values; how we value human life, how we understand the good life, and how we choose to live with one another or prefer not to live with one another. If you worry about poverty or environmental degradation or genocide, then you have to address these problems head on. And you can't make them go away just by making other people go away.

For an extreme example of this way of thinking you might consider another bestseller; this is Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*. This was a book that inspired *Slate* about "global swarming" suggesting that maybe it was time for Americans to start cutting baby emissions. I like to show it alongside this illustration on the left. This is a very different perspective from the American conservative about the baby gap, how after the 2004 election, it was assumed that because Republicans and evangelicals had higher rates of fertility, that they were destined to rule and that miserable, unhappy, decadent family, even if they might be rich living in those blue states in the northeast like me, that they were doomed to irrelevance. So I'm trying to show you how it is that people have a different reaction that sometimes comes down to again how they evaluate the good life.

But in the case of this particular book, let's have a look at Alan Weisman's book. This is a kind of environmentalist utopia. Why is it a utopia? Because it imagines a perfect world, perfect because it has no people. There are no people in Alan Weisman's world, that's why it's so appropriate for Earth Day. Weisman wants to get us started and here's what he says: "worldwide, every four days the human population rises by a million. Since we can't really grasp such numbers, they'll wax out of control until they crash. The intelligent solution would henceforth limit every human female on earth capable of bearing children to one."

Notice he doesn't say anything about men. Presumably men can have as many children with as many women as they want, which I think is telling. But we could debate, you know

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whether for instance the world would really be better without any aunts and uncles, or brothers and sisters, or better yet with nobody at all. But before embarking on a global one-child policy, shouldn't we look at places where they've already tried to limit people to only one child?

China, the largest country in the world, has had a national policy to limit women to one birth for 30 years. They've done this with birth permits and compulsory sterilization and coercive abortions, and this has led to extremely bitter resistance because without any social security system, Chinese depend on sons to provide for them in old age. This peaked in 1983 when China carried out some 20 million sterilizations in a single year. The next year, in recognition, the United Nations awarded the director of China's program, the hardest of the hard liners, mind you, a gold medal and a cash prize.

If you think that the United Nations was giving China a prize because it was promoting and protecting reproductive rights in 1984, then you're more Orwellian than I am. China did finally manage to get its fertility rate down to 1.7. Alas, relatively few of those babies are girls, to the point that boys in some parts of China outnumber girls by almost 40 percent.

There are some that would say that it might be worth the cost that 400 million fewer Chinese have left the world better off, but I want you to have a look at this graph. If you look on the left you can see those countries that were assessed by people working in the population field as having a high program effort, that is, these are countries that were really trying to control fertility rates. You can see the highest program effort score of all was given to China, and China did, it's true, reduce the fertility rate from some six children in 1950 and 1955 to 1.7 in 2000, 2005. You also see significant dropoffs in India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh.

But have a look at the countries to the right. These are the countries with the lowest program effort scores, or at least in the category with the lowest program effort scores. The largest countries in that category included Brazil and Turkey and Argentina, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Notice their fertility rates and how they changed over the same period.

What did the countries on the left do to get that high program effort score? They paid people to be sterilized and in some cases punished them if they refused. And the population control programs in all of these countries received international support. In some cases, like Pakistan and Bangladesh and Indonesia, at times international aid paid for two-thirds or more of the program budget. But again, these other countries in many cases had no program whatsoever

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and still people found the means because it was important to them to control their family size.

Far more important than population control in controlling the population of the world is something very simple and very stubborn: it's whether women actually want to have smaller families. The most important predictor is whether women have access to education. All of the countries you see here that still have fertility rates of over three children per women are also countries with very high rates of female illiteracy. So India in 1990, in the middle of this period, had 60 percent illiteracy, Pakistan 79 percent, Bangladesh 77 percent and in Saudi Arabia half of women were illiterate.

If you have a look in the conclusion of my book, you can see how it is that the fall off in female illiteracy is almost exactly correlated with the global decline in fertility rates. Women who do not have access to education or career opportunities tend to have large families. This is not new information, it has been known for almost a century. The best way to bring down the birth rates was to allow more girls to go to school.

All along, the people that I write about did not see this as a solution; in fact, it was a problem. They worried that educated women were not contributing to the gene pool, so to bring down birth rates, they resorted to increasingly blunt instruments. If simple people did not plan their families in ways that experts found intelligible, then researchers had to come up with simpler methods. If people were too poor to afford them, they could be paid for using them with group pressure providing added inducement. And when many people would not accept IUDs or sterilization or implants or injectables, population controllers dreamed of something that could be added to the water or sprayed through the air, making everyone sterile without an antidote that only authorities could provide. I kid you not, this is actually research that was supported by the Ford Foundation and backed by the Population Council.

When no such technological fix was forthcoming, they denied maternity leave, housing and health care, or simply dragged people to abortion and sterilization clinics and camps like this one. In this case, for instance, from Kerala, this is a camp in which they had 50 beds in a vast operating theatre, one that had been set up temporarily. They were able to carry out some 60,000 sterilizations in a month, and this was promoted as a model for the rest of India. And by the emergency period in India in a single year, 1976, the bicentennial, Indira Gandhi's government sterilized people at the rate of a million a month. And when the World Bank and International Planned Parenthood Federation received word that these measures

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against population control has shown that it is never enough merely to insist on choice,
choices can be, have been, conditi

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